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## **Managing informal interaction: stancetaking and alignment in Dutch and Indonesian**

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**Part I**

**Theory and method**



“Depending on their research questions, scholars can creatively combine methodological tools and (interdisciplinary) theoretical insights in pursuing their specific research endeavors and build on each other’s findings, no matter whether they define their research goal as understanding a particular practice with all its facets or exploring personal, cultural, situational and contextual norms and ideologies that shape interaction more globally”. (Locher 2015:8)

## Introduction - Theory and method

These next chapters give an overview of the relevant theoretical notions and selected method. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis does not reflect a single theoretical approach or theory. Rather, a number of relevant concepts is combined to form an appropriate theoretical foundation to describe and analyze the Dutch and Indonesian informal interactions. The first two chapters in this part are dedicated to the theoretical foundation of the analyses presented in part II. The third chapter included here describes the corpus that was set up for this thesis and explains the methodology.

The aim of this thesis is to uncover patterns of language use concerned with establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. More specifically, I am interested in the way in which participants use spontaneous reactions to construct and express interpersonal alignment. The *phatic function* of language is hence positioned at the core of interactional organization. Interpersonal alignment could be described as a type of negotiation that is focused on relationships and stances. This understanding is grounded in some of the notions that are central to human communication: *coordination*, *common ground*, *joint action*, and *uptake* all of which are addressed in **chapter 2**. These notions pertaining to the organization of interaction are based in a more anthropological or psychological tradition.

Considering the current research is contrastive in nature, the possible influence of cultural preferences has to be addressed as well. Section 2.6 explores the relevance of such notions as collectivism and individualism, the concept of self and the nature of agency often used in cross-cultural (psychological) research. This discussion follows a brief overview of research produced in the field of *politeness*. Again, this is not the immediate focus of this thesis, but politeness is the field that is traditionally associated with the managing of interpersonal relations.

The way in which particular forms or structures contribute to the organization of interaction is the central objective of *conversation analysis*. In general, the aim of conversation analytic work is to closely describe the workings of a specific practice. This means that a selected way of “doing something with language” is studied in natural interaction, taking into account the immediate environment and the unfolding of the interaction following that act. It is thus

emphatically not about the linguistic form in isolation, but about how the linguistic form is interpreted in actual conversation. This is nicely captured by the question “Why that now?” attributed to Schegloff and Sacks (1973). Central aspects in CA work are the organization of turn-taking and sequentiality in interaction. Conversation analysis is not addressed separately in this thesis, but relevant insights are included in **chapter 2**, most notably in section 2.3.

One theoretical concept that is of specific importance to this thesis has already been mentioned: alignment. In short, this refers to the connection between two stances taken by two participants in interaction (e.g. Du Bois, 2007, 2014). Taking the same or a similar stance establishes positive alignment, thus creating a strong sense of similarity between participants; presenting diverging stance results in negative alignment and a feeling of separateness. The focus being on phatic communication, positive alignment is mostly of relevance here. The theoretical notions of *stance* and *alignment* are discussed in **chapter 3**. This chapter also explains how the terms are used in this thesis and what they do (not) include. Finally, the chapter will describe some of the more apparent ways in which alignment is in fact established.

This thesis will pursue an *interactional linguistic* agenda, combining conversation analytic and linguistic anthropological insights. As Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (2018:11-16) explain, interactional linguistics aims at describing linguistic structures and their use to accomplish tasks in social interaction and is interested in cross-linguistic comparison to determine how these interactional patterns influence language structures and use in interaction, and how language impinges on the organization of social interaction. The general aim, then, is not to describe a particular practice at micro-level, but to draw general conclusions about how language is organized and practiced in interaction. The approach - both of interactional linguistics and of this thesis - is strictly *empirical*. The analysis is based on empirical data from natural interaction and uses a context-sensitive approach, meaning the interpretation given to a certain practice needs to be reflected in the actual data. Similarly, the categories that are distinguished are grounded in the data following a general *inductive* approach.

**Chapter 4** introduces the *corpus* and *coding* protocol. Since there was no readily available Dutch or Indonesian spoken corpus available, a corpus of informal conversations was collected. The material was taken from reality TV show Big Brother. The challenges and opportunities that come with using televised material are explored. All material was transcribed and coded by the author, which also has its benefits and downsides. Using some type of model of classification is the only way to both qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the data - and thus the only way to uncover patterns or regularities. However, to ensure the analyst’s coding indeed is reliable and representative, what is coded must be unequivocally and indisputably recognizable as an instance of a particular code. To that end, the coding protocol is discussed in the methods chapter as well (and included in the Appendix).